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AUTHOR Miller, Michael T.; Casebeer, Arthur L.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined alumni giving as related to undergraduate involvement, student housing, academic success, and satisfaction with the education received. Two hundred alumni donors from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's College of Education were surveyed, with a 70% response rate. The study found that alumni donors had not been as involved in extra-curricular activities as non-donors and that on-campus residence halls and community rental units had been the most common housing arrangements, though an unexpectedly high percent of respondents indicated they had lived with their parents or at home and commuted. The study also revealed that alumni donors reported average to above average academic success as undergraduates and were highly satisfied with the education received. Overall, the two factors clearly related to giving were academic achievement and satisfaction with education received. Includes 50 references. (DB)

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Donor Characteristics of College of Education Alumni: Examining Undergraduate Involvement

Michael T. Miller, MSEd
Doctoral Research Assistant
Department of Vocational and Adult Education
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588

Arthur L. Casebeer, EdD
Professor
Department of Higher Education and Educational Administration
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

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Abstract

Educational fund raising has experienced significant growth in the past several years, and in 1988-1989, over $9 billion was raised for education alone. This commitment to fund raising by educational administrators has forced many development officers to try to understand why alumni give. A number of research projects by professional associations, individual fund raisers, and even faculty in higher education have found that alumni donors from higher education have a greater interest in the future of the institution, which may in turn be the result of their involvement in extra-curricular activities as undergraduates.

This study examined alumni giving based on undergraduate involvement, student housing, academic success, and satisfaction with the education received. By surveying 200 alumni donors from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's College of Education, the study found that alumni donors were not as involved in extra-curricular activities as non-donors. The study also revealed that alumni donors had self-reported average to above average academic success as undergraduates, were not as likely to live in on campus residence facilities, and that they are highly satisfied with the education received.

Introduction

During the past decade, state and federal funding for public higher education has failed to keep pace with inflation. To respond to these financially conservative times, virtually all higher education institutions have turned to alumni fund raising to supplement lean budgets. As the art of fund raising has become more popular, the techniques involved in garnering alumni support have become increasingly advanced and sophisticated. Telemarketing, the use of professional direct mail companies, and video solicitations are but a few of the fund raising tactics which ushered in 1990.

One of the most effective and complex efforts of college development offices has been the use of alumni and donor research. Professional associations and a number of researcher have identified a variety of factors which potentially contribute to an alumnus' decision to give, including: number of degrees received from an institutions, whether both spouses received their degrees from the same institution, loyalty, participation in alumni events, satisfaction with the education received, the condition of the country's economy, the institution's financial condition, and the alumnus' income and family status.

Some of these same areas have been studied in relation to student performance and persistence. Indeed, the role of student services and student development have also matured greatly during the 1980's. Many researchers have attempted to identify key factors in successful undergraduate's careers which may be indicators of academic performance and satisfaction. One of the most significant of these findings has been the Involvement in Learning concept. This postulate maintains that there is a strong correlation between student involvement on campus and student success and satisfaction (Astin, 1985). Additionally, it has been identified that those who have outperformed their fellow students generally feel better about their education, their collegiate experience, and their choice of college.

The purpose of this study was to integrate these two dominant research areas in higher

education to find if a relationship exists between undergraduate involvement and donor status. To accomplish this, a profile of alumni donors was developed in relation to student involvement, academic success, undergraduate housing status, and education satisfaction.

Background of the Study

The history of educational fund raising is believed to have begun with "in-kind" contributions, recorded as early as Plato (Wood, 1989). The process of giving, however, did not become formalized until the twelfth century in Europe, as both cash, equipment, and other in-kind gifts were used to help open and sustain new educational institutions (Rashdall, 1936; Haskins, 1957; Wieruszowski, 1966). Fund raising was also utilized to create and maintain new institutions in North America. As these Colonial Colleges grew and faced financial difficulty, fund raising movements through alumni societies kept many institutions, such as Princeton and Yale, open (Curti & Nash, 1965; Maxwell, 1965). Through the 1800's and into the early-1900's, fund raising grew to be more systematic, and with unprecedented demands placed on higher education, fund raising was again a necessity to keep higher education a reality (Stover, 1930; Hans, 1983; Breslow, 1988; Goldin, 1988). Since the 1960's, fund raising has entered into a "professionalism" stage which has emphasized the techniques of fund raising for education (Korvas, 1984). This era of the last half of the 1900's has also been the rise of ethical issues and the federal regulation of fund raising (Linsely, 1989; Schiff, 1989).

The expansion period for higher education of the late-1960's forced higher education institutions to acquire additional staff, facilities, and equipment. Current enrollment declines, however, have forced higher education to employ cutback strategies to reduce expenditures and replace the loss of tuition dollars (Budig, 1981; Chabotar, 1989). While this funding dilemma was forecasted by some (Keezer, 1959), increased demands on the American economy are forcing education to make further budget cuts and become more immediately accountable

for their actions (Campbell, 1982; Anderson & Massy, 1989). Additional cuts in federal spending for higher education in such areas as student financial aid have also begun to have a devastating effect on colleges and universities (Brademas, 1982; Menges, McGill, & Shaeffer, 1986; McMillen, 1989). These financial difficulties have resulted in institutions closing and program reductions (Gardner, 1975). To respond, higher education has taken a more aggressive role in fund raising, but has seen only a moderate growth in the amount of money raised when compared to inflation (Dunn & Hutten, 1985). The total amount of money raised for higher education increased steadily since 1975, but fell from 3% to 10% in the 1988 fiscal year, and rebounded slightly in 1990 (Putka, 1988; Goss, 1989; Bailey, 1990).

There have been a number of studies, dating as far back as 1958, which have attempted to identify why donors give. Several of the studies have suggested that undergraduate involvement may be a factor in an alumnus' decision to participate in alumni and development office activities (Baughman, 1958; Tyus, 1958; Indiana Alumni Association, 1969; Gardner, 1975; Nelson, 1984; McNally, 1984; Dietz, 1985; Hammersmith, 1985; Haddad, 1986), while other studies have found relationships between giving and obligation to society (O'Connor, 1961), attitudes about the institution (Hall, 1967; Chewning, 1984; Korvas, 1984), participation in alumni activities (Caruthers, 1971), loyalty (Dove, 1987), other voluntary organization participation (Markoff, 1978), self esteem and altruism (Anderson, 1981), and the economy (Leslie, Drachman, Conrad, & Ramey, 1983; Leslie & Ramey, 1985). Other studies found differing results for participation in student activities (Miller, 1988), while still other projects have focused on demographic variables (Spaeth & Greeley, 1970; Belcher, 1988), fund raising office procedures, practices (Wolshon, 1981), and structures (Paton, 1982).

Methodology

The research sample was developed based on Fowler's (1984) contention that reliability increases only marginally, at best, in sample sizes over 150. The sample consisted of 200 College of Education alumni donors from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale who had directed their financial contributions through the university's foundation. The sample, which was approximately 1/10 of the College's donor base, was selected using a computer program of random numbers from fiscal year 1988 data. To control for mitigating variables, and to add to the sample's purity, only bachelor degree graduates were selected, excluding multiple degree and husband-wife degree graduates, and advanced degree graduates.

A 16-item survey was designed to measure the extent of the undergraduate's involvement, academic success, housing status, and degree of satisfaction with the education received. The questionnaire was pre-tested to check for reliability, clarity, and length of time to complete, and was eventually mailed to the sample in the early fall, prior to the College's telefund and homecoming. A usable response rate of approximately 70% was achieved (69.8%).

Results

Of the respondents to the questionnaire, 48% reported being involved with extra-curricular activities as undergraduates. Of those responding positively to involvement, 10% reported involvement in four to six activities, 3% reported involvement in seven to ten activities, and the remaining 87% reported involvement in one to three student activities. The most frequent types of activities were departmental organizations (20% of the respondents) such as the Student Recreation Society of the Department of Recreation, followed by Greek-letter organizations, intramural sports, and special interest groups, all with a 14% response.

Of the 48% who reported being involved, 53% also reported holding a student leadership position on campus. The most frequently identified organization in which a leadership

position was held was in Greek-letter organizations. Departmental student organizations were also a popular selection with 18% of the respondents. For individuals that did not hold leadership positions, 25% reported above average involvement in student organizations. The majority of the respondents in this category, however, rated their involvement as moderate (41%).

On-campus residence halls and community rental units were the most common housing arrangement responses. The write-in response of "home" and "commuted" was the third most popular living arrangement with 19% of the responses. Of those that reported that they lived on-campus, 52%, reported doing so for only one year, and the remaining 48% reported that they lived on-campus for two to four years.

When asked if the alumnus graduated with honors, 23% of all respondents answered affirmatively. An additional 60% rated their academic success as above average, and 30% reported average performance while in college.

As a side note, 80% of those who reported graduating with honors had at least moderate involvement as undergraduates, and 62% lived in on-campus housing facilities for two or more years.

In response to satisfaction, 85% stated that they would repeat their undergraduate experience at the same institution. An even higher percentage (89%) stated that they would recommend their alma mater to incoming freshmen, and 94% of the respondents were satisfied with the education they received.

Findings and Discussion

These results indicate that at least a partial relationship exists between alumni giving behavior and undergraduate experiences, while a stronger relationship appears evident between academic success, satisfaction, and alumni giving. Also, based on the high return rate of the

survey, it can be concluded that the alumni are still concerned about their alma mater.

While only 48% of the respondents indicated involvement as undergraduates, they also reported a higher level of satisfaction and academic performance than their non-involved counter parts. This group of respondents was fairly evenly divided on housing, with slightly over half (52%) residing in on-campus facilities. The majority of this was due to residence in Greek housing.

The only two factors which were clearly related to giving were academic achievement and satisfaction. An additional contributing factor may be the concept of allegiance to the geographic area, and not necessarily the institution. The unexpectedly high percent of respondents that indicated that they lived with their parents or at home and commuted illustrates that alumni who give, are alumni who came from the region around the institution.

In general, this study provided a profile of alumni donors to SIU-C, a typical large, mid-western, Carnegie Classification Research II university. These alumni donors were found to be those students who achieved above average as undergraduates and who today are satisfied with the education offered and received at SIU-C. With this description, the question of where to start an alumni cultivation program arises. Historically, many alumni offices have started programs with fraternity and sorority members, and especially undergraduates that have been involved with service organizations. This study suggests that these efforts to involve young alumni may be better suited for students that were slightly above-average academically, but not necessarily involved with student organizations. This study also provided an indirect endorsement for student alumni and student foundation type programs. The preconceived perception of alumni volunteers who were former fraternity presidents, star athletes, or residence hall assistants is disappearing, and some preparation for future alumni leaders needs to be considered as a possible alumni and development cultivation effort.

It should be mentioned that students studying education and alumni from such programs are unique, and alumni from late-1960s and early-1970s liberal arts programs, for example, possess a unique body of characteristics which may make them worthy of individual segmentation. This sample was designed to take into account varying trends and provide an accurate reflection of alumni from the field of education. It is readily admitted, however, that further study to understand and forecast the future of alumni relations and alumni giving needs to be undertaken.

The uniqueness of this College of Education should also be noted. It raises the issue of not only the context within a college of education existing in terms of size and interdisciplinary programming with other campus collegiate units, but also the contextual relationship of the institution to other state higher education institutions. This contextual relationship not only articulates a uniqueness in terms of institutional position and base for student recruitment, but also highlights the need for uniqueness in alumni fund raising. For example, with SIU-C not being the land grant institution in the state, many consider the institution to be of a regional nature, which is consistent with the study's findings of alumni who appear to place a high value on the region. Approximately one-third of the institutions students during the year of study, were from the area (100 miles or less), and the study sample represented this distribution. In terms of cultivation, this means that the institution is better equipped and the alumni are better structured to facilitate a regional, grass roots, chapter program, rather than concentrating efforts on large metropolitan areas.

In many ways, this study serves as a base for further study. With this type of instrument and methodology, alumni societies have the opportunity to compare alumni donor characteristics, and to adopt similar cultivation and solicitation activities. It is hoped that further research will be done to refine and redefine the questionnaire to suit larger samples and to continue evaluating student involvement and alumni activity.

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